

ALL
Swearing Prohibited

UNDER THE
G O S P E L.

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L O N D O N :

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DIVERS of the people called Quakers having of late been repeatedly urged, both in courts of judicature and elsewhere, to produce their reasons for refusing to give evidence upon oath; for the satisfaction of inquirers, the following are briefly exhibited.

It hath appeared to this people, from their beginning, that the great Legislator of the Christian dispensation, in his evangelical sermon upon the mount, intending to shew the superior excellence of this dispensation to that of the Mosaic law, observed, Mat. v. That the law condemned iniquity in its actual branches; but the gospel should require the prevention of them, by striking at the root from whence they spring.

He noted that the law forbad the commission of murder, adultery, and perjury; but he commanded, not to be angry, not to look upon a woman to lust after her, and not to swear at all. For if people may give place to anger, it may kindle into rage, and end in murder; if they may indulge a lustful eye, fornication and adultery may be the consequence; and if they are allowed to swear, evil-doers may forswear to obtain their purposes, or to escape the punishment due to their demerits.

Our Saviour, therefore, laid the axe to the root; and, with regard to swearing, he saith, "Ye have heard it was said by them of old time, thou shalt not forswear thyself, but shalt perform unto the Lord thine oaths. But I say unto you, *Swear not at all.*"—Here, as in the cases of murder and adultery, he cuts up the root, the surest way to destroy both the growth and existence of the branches, and perfect the work of reformation; for "*He,*" as John said "*will thoroughly purge his floor.*" This perfect work was not the business of the law, but that of the gospel: for *the law made nothing perfect; but the bringing in of a better hope did.* By the total prohibition of oaths, the gospel, where it is duly observed, effectually prevents perjury, equivocations, or lying, as well as the profanation

fanation of the sacred name in common converse.

Proceeding then to some particular objects the Jews were accustomed to swear by, our Lord adds, “ Neither by heaven, “ for it is God’s throne; nor by the earth, “ for it is his footstool; neither by Jeru- “ salem, for it is the city of the great “ king. Neither shalt thou swear by thy “ head, because thou canst not make one “ hair white or black.” If we are not to swear by any thing that is his, because it is his, nor by any thing that we can neither *make*, nor *change* the nature of; then certainly *not by the gospel*, which is wholly his, and which never could be in our power either to make or alter.

These passages relating to murder, adultery, and swearing, are comparative, and professedly intended by our Lord to shew the preference of the precepts and doctrines of the gospel to those of the law. He knew that taking the Lord’s name in vain, swearing by the gods of the heathen, and forswearing, were all strictly forbidden by the law; and had he only forbid these, he had not at all exceeded the law, which he manifestly meant to do by his introducing

his own command, with the distinction, *But*, and following it with, *I say unto you, Swear not at all, &c.*

Having delivered the negative part of his command, he comes to the positive, "Let
 " your *word* (which *Λος* in the Greek signifies, and not communication) be yea,
 " yea, nay, nay; for whatsoever is more
 " than these, cometh of evil." In whatsoever we affirm or deny, therefore, and on whatever occasion, our yea or nay ought to be simply such; *for whatsoever is* (or amounts to) *more than these*, (as an oath certainly is or does,) *cometh of evil*.

For though swearing by the name of the Lord, on solemn occasions, had been allowed to the Israelites, under the ministration of Moses, the servant, yet, under the purer dispensation of the Son of God, oaths were expressly forbidden by him. Conscious of this, the apostle James, also, chap. v. 6. exhorts, "Above all things, my
 " brethren, *swear not*, neither by heaven, neither by the earth, neither
 " by *any other oath*; but let your yea,
 " be yea; and your nay, nay; lest ye
 " fall into condemnation." If we are neither to swear by heaven or earth, nor by *any other oath*, we ought undoubtedly

edly to abstain from oaths of all kinds, upon all occasions, and not to exceed the terms of simple affirmation in any case whatever; that we may avoid the condemnation consequent upon a breach of this Christian precept.

To say, that our Lord's descending to a few particulars after his general command, "Swear not at all," shews that he meant only to prohibit swearing by those particulars, implies, that he first commanded what he had no intention to establish, and used an expression both improper and superfluous; for in that case, he needed only to have said, Swear not by heaven, for it is God's throne; nor by the earth, for it is his footstool, &c. But, surely, he no more intended to revoke his general command, by a brief assumption of particulars after it, than the Divine Wisdom, *Exod. xx.* meant to recall the general command, "Thou shalt have no other gods before me," by adding, "Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing," &c. In both cases, the general command stands equally independent of the particulars that follow, and not only comprehends them, but all others of like nature.

As

As to the allegations, that God himself
 fware*, I answer with Athanasius; ‘ Seeing
 ‘ it is certain it is proper in swearing to
 ‘ swear by another, thence it appears, that
 ‘ God, to speak properly, did never swear
 ‘ but only improperly: whence, speak-
 ‘ ing to men, he is said to swear, be-
 ‘ cause those things which he speaks,
 ‘ because of the certainty and immuta-
 ‘ bility of his will, are to be esteemed
 ‘ for oaths.’ Compare Psalm cx. 4.
 ‘ where it is said, “ The Lord did swear,
 “ and it did not repent him,” &c. And
 “ I swore (saith he) by myself:” and this
 ‘ is not an oath; for he did not swear by
 ‘ another, which is the property of an
 ‘ oath, but by himself. Therefore God
 ‘ swears not according to the manner of
 ‘ men, neither can we be induced from
 ‘ thence to swear. But let us so do and
 ‘ say, and shew ourselves such by speak-
 ‘ ing and acting, that we need not an oath
 ‘ with those who hear us; and let our
 ‘ words of themselves have the testimony
 ‘ of truth: for so we shall plainly imitate
 ‘ God.’

Bishop Burnet, in his Exposition of the
 Thirty-nine Articles, article 39, says ‘ It

* See Barclay’s Apology, p. 549.

‘ must

‘ must be confessed these words seem to be
 ‘ so express and positive, that great regard is
 ‘ to be had to a scruple that is founded
 ‘ on authority that seems to be so full.’

‘ The learned Huetius, Bishop of Avran-
 ‘ ches, in France, says, “ It is well known
 ‘ by that precept of Christ,” Mat. v. 34.
 ‘ That swearing is to be entirely avoided ;
 ‘ and the same is repeated in the epistle of
 ‘ James, chap. v. 12.” And Josephus
 ‘ shews, that, ‘ the Essenes looked upon an
 ‘ oath to be worse than perjury, because
 ‘ he seemed to be already condemned, who
 ‘ could not be believed, unless he attested
 ‘ the name of God. And when Maimo-
 ‘ nides would prove the same thing, he
 ‘ makes use of the very words of Christ.
 ‘ But let us return to Pythagoras, whose
 ‘ precept about swearing was observed so
 ‘ strictly by his disciples, that one of them
 ‘ let a fine of three talents be set upon him,
 ‘ rather than affirm the truth by swearing;
 ‘ he is called Syllas, by Jamblicus, but
 ‘ Clinias, by Basil. The whole nation of
 ‘ the Phrygians were very much against
 ‘ oaths; they neither required others to take
 ‘ them, nor did they take them themselves.
 ‘ Amongst the adages of the Arabs, this is
 ‘ a celebrated one, “ Never swear, but let
 ‘ thy word be yes or no ;” ‘ which custom
 ‘ the

‘ the Talepains of Siam observe, manifestly
‘ according to the doctrine of Christ.

‘ What Basil has said of Clinias, Dr.
‘ Potter, Bishop of Oxford, says, is con-
‘ firmed by Hierocles, in his Commentary
‘ on the Second Precept of the Golden
‘ Verses of Pythagoras; and another author
‘ says, This is likely to be done out of love
‘ to truth, and the respect he bore to his
‘ Master’s doctrine, who said, Let no man
‘ attest God by an oath, though in courts
‘ of judicature, but use to speak such
‘ things, as that he may be credited with-
‘ out an oath. See Jamblicus de Vita Py-
‘ thagor. p. 120 and 126.’

As to the other allegation of its be-
ing said in scripture, “ Men verily
“ swear by the greater, and an oath for
“ confirmation, is *to them* an end of
“ all strife;” this was only a transient
observation on the common practice of
unbelievers, and is no reason for the con-
tinuance of oaths among Christians. To
all such kind of pleas, it is answered,
that we are not authorised to imitate
what has been formerly done under the
law, nor to follow the customs of others,
against the express commands of Christ,
the Law-giver appointed us of God;
but

but ought always inviolably to observe his precepts.

It hath been insinuated, that his prohibition of oaths ' was not meant to extend to the counteraction of the great ' ends of publick justice and social security.' But it is very clear to us, that our Lord, by commanding, *Swear not at all*, and his apostle, by exhorting, " Above " all things, my brethren, *swear not*, neither by heaven, neither by the earth, " nor by *any other oath*," intended a total prohibition of swearing in the Christian church. They indubitably knew, that the maintenance of publick justice and social security, depends on truth and faithfulness, and not on the imposition of oaths, which are neither needful to the virtuous, nor binding to the vicious; for were it not for the penalties annexed, it is to be feared, the oaths of these latter would not hold them.

The conscientious amongst the people called Quakers, are willing to give their evidence in a way consistent with the injunctions of Christ and his apostles; but they dare not do it in the manner that they verily believe is forbidden. It is not the evidence, but the oath, that they scruple;

scruple; because they are sensible that no human authority can excuse them before the tribunal of Divine Justice: but they have always stood ready to give their evidence, where it might be admitted without a violation of the precepts of Christ and his apostles; *and therefore are not to be charged with the obstruction of justice.*

Where Almighty God requires one thing, and human powers the contrary, which is the conscientious subject to obey? The apostle Peter answers, Acts v. 29, "We ought to obey God rather than men." Ought not the divine authority ever to be held sacred and supreme? Why then are any reproached and ridiculed for practically maintaining its due preference, that they may keep a conscience void of offence towards God?

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